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SUBJECT: MARRAKESH'S FIRST FEMALE MAYOR SETS AN
AMBITIOUS COURSE

REF: RABAT 0858

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Marrakesh Mayor Fatima Zohra El Mansouri, the first female mayor of a major Moroccan city, discussed with PolOffs her goals of providing good governance and bringing real improvements to the lives of Marakesh's residents. She also described the challenges of managing a city hall composed of a broad coalition of political parties and attitudes toward good governance. Mansouri waxed eloquent about how crucial it is for her Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) to demonstrate that it can govern effectively and transparently -- given how heavily it emphasized these themes during the campaign. Mansouri also offered enthusiastic support for the Secretary's upcoming visit to Marrakesh. END SUMMARY.

ENTHUSIASM FOR S VISIT

2. (U) On October 22, PolCouns and Political Assistant met with Mayor of Marrakesh Fatima Zohra El Mansouri, the first female mayor of a major Moroccan city. Mansouri expressed her enthusiasm for meeting Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and underscored the symbolic importance this can represent for women's political participation in Morocco. Mansouri believed that hosting the meeting at the City Hall would be highly symbolic for Morocco's democratization process.

PAM'S CHALLENGES IN MARRAKESH

3. (SBU) Turning to politics, Mansouri expressed her optimism and confidence in the choices the PAM made to consolidate Morocco's democratization process. She explained that the PAM's intentions are to hoist the political field upwards by practicing good governance. Mansouri conceded that the PAM attracted many opportunists because its founder, Fouad Ali El Himma, is a tremendously able politician and a close friend of the King. However, Mansouri explained that although a new party cannot be too selective regarding its adherents, it can chose to be selective in identifying leaders on the basis of merit. In this regard, she cited the fact that 80 percent of the PAM candidates who won office in June's communal elections were all first-time political participants who ran and won based on their new ideas and their merits. In addition, she gave the example of PAM party members who won election but were subsequently removed from office because it was discovered that they had accepted campaign contributions from known

narcotics traffickers. In these cases, the PAM often had to give up a seat on a communal council, but the party felt it more important to lose a seat than to permit a corrupt party member to occupy it.

PAM AND THE ISLAMISTS -- COOPERATION IN MARRAKESH

14. (SBU) The animosity between the PAM and the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD) is well known (reftel) on the national level. However, Mansouri explained that there are actually some similarities between the PJD and the PAM and that, on the Marrakesh level, their cooperation is actually quite good. Like the PAM, the PJD embraces the principles of good governance, anti-corruption and transparency, she said. In addition, both parties are internally democratic and seek to reward initiative. Finally, Mansouri suggested, the PJD is the only other major party that has not yet held office and governed extensively. In this regard, however, there is a big difference: The PJD -- in large part through explicit PAM efforts -- does not currently control a single major city council in Morocco, whereas the PAM controls several as a result of the June elections. Therefore, unlike the PJD, the PAM now has the opportunity to put its governance vision into action over the next five years.

15. (SBU) And in this regard, Mansouri is clearly eager to set a strong example. She explained that her biggest challenge for Marrakesh is to eliminate

the slums on the city's peripheries and to provide the population with decent living conditions. These improvements are not only something the citizens deserve, she stressed, but also critical to maintaining and strengthening social cohesion. She has also embarked on a personal effort to encourage all city council members -- not just PAM party members -- to engage with their constituencies; to seek out ways to deliver services to them and improve the city; and to proactively root out corruption and complacency.

16. (SBU) Mansouri admitted that this last goal -- in short, to hold elected officials responsible for actually governing, rather than simply "holding office" -- has created some tremors within the council, especially among long-entrenched politicians who are not accustomed to working hard at anything except getting re-elected. However, she also said that many have embraced her new approach. She has received enormous support from both public and private institutions and from other political parties. Even her cooperation with the PJD -- the PAM's arch rival -- has been positive, she said; local PJD officials have shown a willingness to work with her, and the national Secretary General of the PJD, Abdelilah Benkirane, commended her after her election, she said. She explained that no one wants to see the first big-city woman mayor fail.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) Capable and ambitious, Mansouri clearly represents the type of political leader the PAM wants at the forefront in its ascendancy. She clearly understands that much of Morocco will be watching her successes and failures, not only because she is the first woman mayor of a major city, but also as a leading indicator of whether the PAM can live up to its stated promises to govern competently and to bring governance closer to the people.

18. (SBU) Mayor Mansouri is the granddaughter of a former Pasha, a prominent local official, from Marrakesh. The family connections reportedly played an important role in Mansouri's election. Now, her family is once again administering Marrakesh -- but with the people's blessing. END COMMENT.

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